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Dramatické aktivity v heterogenních třídách při  
výuce anglického jazyka

Drama Activities in Heterogeneous EFL classes

Les activites dramatiques dans les classes  
heterogeniques pendant des cours d'Anglais

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## **Abstract**

The diploma thesis deals with the use of dramatizing activities when teaching English language at basic school. The author concentrates on specific qualities of these activities that help pupils with weaker language abilities to integrate in courses and that leads in unifying heterogeneous classes. Part one introduces general advantages of educational grammar and defines dramatic activities. In this part, characteristics of the heterogeneous class and the important principles of teaching in such classes are defined. The end of the theoretical part sums up the basic methodological rules that must be followed if dramatic activities are to be used during English language courses. The practical part of the paper contains six activity plans which demonstrate the use of dramatic activities in mixed ability classes. The results of the project support the thesis and suggest the conditions for using dramatizing activities for the target group of pupils. Examples of materials used during the activities are included in the appendix.

## **Anotace**

Tato práce se zabývá dramatickými aktivitami při výuce anglického jazyka na základní škole. Autor se soustředí na jejich specifické vlastnosti pomáhající žákům se slabšími jazykovými schopnostmi zapojit se do hodin a tím sjednotit heterogenní třídu. První část představuje obecné výhody výchovné gramatiky a definuje dramatické aktivity. V této kapitole je dále charakterizována heterogenní třída a jsou zde shrnuty důležité principy výuky v ní. Závěr teoretické části shrnuje základní metodické zásady při použití dramatických aktivit v hodinách angličtiny. Praktická část projektu obsahuje přípravy na vyučování a záznamy z průběhu aktivit, které jsou nutné k závěrečné reflexi. Ta ve svých závěrech podporuje úvodní hypotézu a navrhuje vhodné podmínky pro výuku dramatických aktivit v cílové skupině žáků. Součástí příprav jsou i materiály použité při aktivitách, které jsou uvedeny v přílohách.

## **Resumé**

Le mémoire étudie les activités dramatiques pendant des cours de la langue anglaise à l'École élémentaire. L'auteur concentre sur propres spécificités des élèves avec une capacité de langue moins bonne qui leur aident à s'intégrer aux cours et unifier la classe hétérogène. Dans la première partie du travail, les avantages générales avec les définitions des activités dramatiques sont présentés. Dans ce travail, une classe hétérogène est caractérisée autant que des principes importants de l'enseignement. La partie théorique résume préceptes méthodique de base en appliquant des activités dramatiques aux cours d'Anglais. La partie pratique du travail comprends des préparations écrites aux cours et les notes prises pendant les activités qui sont nécessaires à la réflexion terminale. Les exemples des documents utilisés pendant des activités sont inclus dans les suppléments.

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# **1 Introduction**

The teacher's work in the constantly changing world of school where he or she meets hundreds of children every day is surely demanding. Some teachers joke about better schools without children or they daydream about classes full of talented model pupils. The reality is obviously the opposite. The classes are occupied by twenty or thirty completely different learners, many of them always ready for mischief. However, they are also ready to learn. And even if they are far from the model pupils and some of them are even called "bad learners" the teacher has to take everybody into account. He/she has to choose a long term strategy and sum up his options and that is not easy at all. This diploma thesis offers one of the possible ways to treat heterogeneous classes – dramatizing activities. It searches theoretical preconditions of dramatizing to assist the mixed ability class and it verifies these thoughts in the practical project. The paper also looks for concrete teaching conditions leading to the desired goal – help all learners to take part in English lesson and highlights the most important elements of dramatizing activities that aid weak learners in heterogeneous classes.

## **2 Drama in English teaching**

### **2.1 What does drama mean?**

Searching for a precise definition of drama does not have to be difficult. Nevertheless, Brian Way (1996, p.7), a British expert on drama education, offers an expressive example instead: "An answer to the question: 'Who is a blind man?' may be: 'A person who doesn't see.' However, another possible answer is: 'Close your eyes and find a way out of the room'." The later option defines drama better than any academic description. Moreover, it indicates its best qualities – authenticity of experience. Children must integrate their reason, body, imagination and emotions to act out a blind person. This complexity of drama makes it a very useful tool at school.

## **2.2 The universal values of drama**

### ***2.2.1 Drama is a significant element of child's development***

Educational drama may be a mediator for learning in different subjects at the elementary school; however, it bears universal qualities helping to educate and nurture children in a broader sense. Drama is a very natural way of learning since it follows patterns of children's natural behaviour. "Children," as Phillips (1999, p.6) says, "have got a natural desire to act from three or four years of age." Make-believe games are a part of their everyday play since then. Drama is certainly an integral component of human development.

### ***2.2.2 Emotions in drama***

Drama is a school activity which brings a lot of emotions in classroom. Emotional side of drama is doubtlessly one of the most appreciated components helping the child's development. Initially, emotions raise the efficiency of learning; people are able to remember more and for a longer time when strong emotions accompany the learning process. Emotions also play a major part in our behaviour, decision making and understanding of other people. The role of drama in which the child participates to cultivate and develop emotions is very valuable then.

### ***2.2.3 Drama as a tool of social learning***

Drama is a device of social learning as well. Bernard (1972, p.91) enumerated that "It [drama] provides for the acquisition and exercise of social skills-cooperation, conversation, mutual respect, friendliness, and courtesy. " Furthermore, drama also helps children to overcome difficulties and fears and makes it easier to learn about their feelings by giving children chance to express themselves in a safe shelter of imaginary world of dramatizing. The opportunity of close and intensive contact with coevals makes it easier to learn about their surroundings.

#### *2.2.4 Drama and thinking*

Drama is based on group work. Children in a group are co-operatively testing strategies that can bring them to the mutual goal. This requires a lot of planning and considering possible options for pupils thus it helps learners developing symbolic thinking, imagination and problem solving skills.

These unique features of drama should not be ignored but used as a foundation for specialized teaching. EFL (English as a foreign language) classes benefit from them as well and many teachers are aware of it. Nevertheless, some of the teachers are not aware that they are using dramatizing activities disguised as games or chants. They would probably deny they teach drama having a theatre play in mind. To prevent confusion both terms are compared in the following chapter.

### **2.3 Dramatizing**

#### *2.3.1 The difference between theatrical drama and dramatizing*

As many authors point out, there is a major difference between drama used to teach EFL and drama in the more general sense. The one who is not involved in language teaching would probably resemble a play. Theatrical drama might certainly belong in a school setting but subject of this thesis is far from such complex and time-consuming activity, which an on-stage performance definitely is. Since the term “drama” might cause some misunderstanding, techniques used in the ELT (English language teaching) classroom will be referred to as dramatizing activities or dramatizing and it is important to make the distinction between the two. Unlike theatrical plays, dramatizing is not focused on a final performance and sometimes there is very



little or no real acting done in front of the class in the end. The process itself is of equal importance since the child learns more through experiencing the process and not by entertaining the spectators. As Wessels (1987, p.11) sums up: “While in theatre is everything contrived for the benefit of the audience, in classroom drama everything is contrived for the benefit of the learners.” Dramatizing activity may take just a couple of minutes or it may be done instantly from scratch by contrast to time spent rehearsing for a stage play. Children do not have to memorize long scripts but rather use language creatively adding their own ideas which helps them to practice every day communication.

### *2.3.2 The merits of dramatizing activities in EFL teaching*

Although dramatizing is different from theatrical drama, it involves body, facial expression and dramatic use of voice (paralinguistic communication) as well. It links the non-living world of language learning with a physical expression – acting. The combination of language and acting in the classroom connects content and personal attitudes of the learner. If a child had to act out a doctor, he or she would do it in his or her unique way. The child employs his or her own imagination, emotions, opinions, and personality and the English lesson becomes “... a human event not just a piece of information” concludes Halliwell (1992, p.10). And this “... complexity and authenticity of the way children communicate is an important condition of language acquisition.” emphasises Wessels (1987, p.12). Learning of English becomes more natural, effective and interesting.

Second feature of dramatizing discussed in this chapter is the “creative tension” (Wessels, 1987) which literally generates true communication in dramatic activities. In reality people start to communicate when they want to learn something they do not know or they want to tell something the other may want to hear. In genuine world they can never be sure of the other’s reaction.

The principle of opinion and information gap is applied in many dramatizing activities as well. If children know in advance what to expect from an activity, the exercise becomes just a controlled mechanical drill. On the contrary, dramatizing is usually freer activity which provides a framework for communication allowing some creativity. The communication involves two (or more) sides and one does not see everything what the opposite side knows. Information and opinion gap means constant surprise, unpredictable answers, questions and reactions or changing minds; these are situations that bring a lot of excitement, curiosity and the resulting interest in speaking. The gap also creates a situation in which only speaking can move the child towards the completion of a task. As Duff (1982, p.14) says “The problem of not wanting to speak or not knowing what to say is practically resolved because the activity makes it necessary to talk.”

Next beneficial quality is based on the task-oriented character of dramatizing. Firstly, to fulfil a task of an activity, students have to exchange some information. The children’s attention diverts from the language while focusing on the message. Since the language accuracy concerns often hinder children from speaking or, at least from speaking freely, dramatizing supports fluency practice very well. In addition, meaningfulness of the task based dramatizing gives children more motivation to work in ESL class.

Moreover, the possibility of using incomplete sentences, sounds, and body gives children “the chance to communicate even with limited language resources.” as Phillips (1999, p.6) remarks. Pupils often use chunks of language which are not comprehensible without a context of acting. This is the way we speak outside of the classroom. Pointing at bread accompanied by the word please usually means that a person in a shop wants to buy the bread. The situational context of an activity should make clear what the learner wants to say even if he or she may use just one word or gesture. The help of acting means more children may communicate in the language class.

### *2.3.3 Categorization of dramatic activities*

The term “dramatizing” covers a broad scale of activities. Apart from the meeting point, acting, they may seem very different from each other. The activities may be as simple as clapping the hands or showing likes or dislikes using various facial expressions; however, dramatizing can also embrace very complex simulations of real life situations. To simplify it, they can be divided into two basic categories – non-verbal exercises and the activities in which speaking is involved. Sub-groups may overlap and many authors present their own detailed classifications. The criteria may vary from cognitive processes that activities stimulate (interpretation, observation) to function activities take in the English lesson (starters, relaxation activities). An unexpected extent of dramatizing aggravates orientation thus it is worth following the simplest diversion and highlighting their distinct characteristics.

#### *Non-verbal activities*

Amazingly enough we do not have to speak in the classroom and still learn a lot. It is a well known fact that most of the message proceeds in an extra linguistic way and non-verbal exercise, the first dramatizing category, uses this manner for “immediate motivation, physical and mental stimulation” during lessons (Senf, online). Non-verbal exercise includes very little or no language at all, but it does not stand on its own in the lesson; it is preceded or followed by some type of language exercise, hence the learner practices English through a detour full of action and body movement. Non-verbal activities also serve secondary purposes. Short and easy exercises may assist in control of the class dynamics or help to establish the desired classroom atmosphere. These activities often begin the lesson or lead into the next activity. Getting-to-know activities, icebreakers, warm-ups and energy release activities are common

examples of the short and undemanding activities. These are a good introduction to drama and as soon as learners gain some confidence in their language abilities they can move on further towards the verbal activities.

### *Verbal activities*

Verbal exercises are the next logical step in dramatizing; nevertheless, the scale is very broad and the expected language output can be as little as a one word response in a mime-guess game. Of course, miming a sketch can launch a discussion with advanced students as well. However, acting stays in the background at any level and the learner is supposed to focus on the particular task. Children solve problems, rework given information, create their own products or guess the meaning, compete in a game; in order to do so they use the language only as a medium. Veracity of verbal activities gradually ascends towards genuinely conversational activities as role-plays and simulations which are, as a good example of verbal dramatizing activities, further described.

### *Role-play*

Taking roles is very natural to children and they do this with enthusiasm. Yet, role-play is not just plain reading out text book dialogues that smaller children enjoy. The excitement of such activity evaporates after a while since repeating someone else's dialogue loses the point and becomes dull very quickly. Role-plays and simulations represent something that is more appealing and efficient - an activity in which children have the right to choose their own words, emotions and make the text (language) come alive. They seize the role but their role seizes them as well which makes it a source of surprising outcomes thus it is one of the most amusing parts of the lesson. Children try to solve different life situations, answer real questions with no predetermined

response. Of course, they are limited by their language ability but the body and imagination is a surprisingly deep source of variants.

### *Simulations*

Simulations go even deeper into reality. Children will really do what the subject of the exercise is about. If their task is to make a film, they will prepare a script, provide props, choose actors, rehearse scenes, record a video and even screen it in front of an audience. De Porto (1997) states that children may practice all four skills throughout the process since the simulations are a good way of integrating speaking and daily classroom activities for they can be adapted to the requirements of the syllabus. Since a simulation can be so complex it belongs to “the high risk” (Dougill, 1987) activities for which teacher and students need conscionable preparation, enthusiasm and at least some experience with dramatizing.

### *Variability of exercises*

Both very broad categories of dramatizing can find numerous use in EFL classes. Variability of dramatizing exercises serves practicing not only of major speaking skills but also many other areas of language and it often exceeds the boundaries of language learning. However, the main asset of dramatizing in English language classroom is the comeback of a natural way in which the language is used in everyday life. Many children who resist the overly intellectual and synthetic “textbook world” may find dramatizing a great help.

Even if some dramatizing activities are very sophisticated and seem to be too difficult, many of them can be adapted into some extent to concrete conditions. Role-play which has been initially used as an activity for ninth graders may be simplified to the needs of fourth graders. On the other hand, simple activities such as miming may be developed into much more demanding

challenge for advanced students. This variability helps the teacher to suit an activity to the needs of his or her customers.

### **3 Mixed ability class is our class**

Prodromou (1992, p.7) claims that “All classes are made up of individuals who differ in any number of ways” and no one can deny, there is no such class as perfectly uniform class in all aspects. This chapter is trying to define regular mixed ability class as well as find beneficial aspects of dramatizing suitable for mixed ability class.

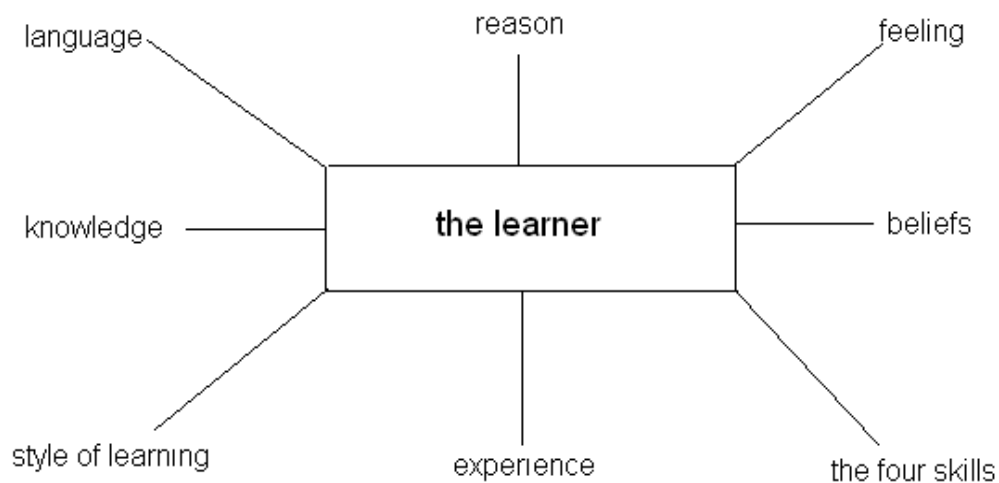
#### **3.1 What is the mixed ability class?**

It is Tuesday morning and the 8<sup>th</sup> graders start their school day with English. Twenty-four people are to go through the same tasks, they are given the same instructions, and they are asked the same questions. The class is literally made of two groups which have, in the name of efficiency, merged a few months ago. Five of them are about to fail in English and in two or more other subjects. These five pupils are chronic low-achievers and they do not see or sometimes do not want to see any way out. It is clear they will lack motivation especially if they are going to finish elementary school a year earlier. The rest of the children are doing very well which makes this class an acute case of a mixed ability class. The “bad learners” were seemingly put aside in past years and now it is already too late for saving the situation. Such groups of children make the teacher think about the problem more intensively; nonetheless, every class has got mixed ability learners and the issue certainly deserves attention.

### **3.2 The child as a whole person**

#### *3.2.1 The complexity of reasons causing disparity in the EFL class*

One would think that the lack of language dispositions is the major cause for failure in the classroom. However; poor results may be influenced by innumerable amount of further factors. Prodromou (1992, p.7) summarizes eight basic areas that affect the learner in the simple diagram (fig.1). The diagram shows that the notion of a bad and excellent pupil is very complex.



*fig.1: The learner*



### *3.2.2 Intellect*

Intellect could be the first area which comes up in one's mind when looking for the roots of learner's bad school results. The synthetic environment in the classroom requires more intellectual effort compared to its use in a natural out-of-the-class language acquisition. Children have to start comparing their mother tongue with the second language, analyze and solve problems, choose the right test-taking strategy or memorize vocabulary very early. These demands are contrasting communicative concept of today's learning and they may complicate children's language growth.

### *3.2.3 Emotions*

Emotions affect learning very strongly as well. Children who are insecure or nervous do not perform the same way as the others and a moody child would not receive as much support from peers as someone who is optimistic. These are examples of negative feelings: nevertheless, emotions may have a positive side and encourage children in learning.

### *3.2.4 Background of the learner*

The learner's performance depends also on what he or she has experienced or what is his or her attitude towards English. Children come from different backgrounds and bring different "bags" full of experience, beliefs and knowledge to school. They may consider English unimportant or hate the school, often influenced by a family background, They may have done a lot of dull school drills and have lost their interest before even started to learn English. They can just favor different activities than sitting among thirty other pupils for hours. Next, the child can be hugely disadvantaged lacking on knowledge other children master and feel lost or even intimidated in the classroom once he or she needs to build on it Having a different starting line

does surely harm the school work and not seeing the reasons distorts perception of the class for the teacher.

### **3.3 The “low-achievers” in the classroom**

The assessment in the language classroom is chiefly connected with the four skills. Speaking, writing, listening and reading are the primary goals in a language, thus their thorough evaluation tells who is better or worse in classroom; although, as written above, no one can completely see what might have influenced learners’ language competence. The teacher cannot know all the causes to their full extent, but he or she must deal with the consequences which arise from the language ability differentiation. Both ends of the scale trigger difficulties but the low end would be certainly a major pain in the neck. They are called “weak learners” or “slower learners”. The children on this end are not able to be even average in one of the skills and quickly fall behind in almost any activity promoting the ‘square deal’. Not only do they lose track and need an extra help, but their poor results lead to a lack of interest or even discipline problems. Low-achievers in the class demand a lot of careful work. The teacher has to be aware of their presence all the time and give them plenty of chances.

### **3.4 Dramatizing and mixed ability classes**

Several principles helping to unite the mixed ability class are an essential part of dramatizing in the classroom. First of all, dramatizing is a significant element of a child’s life. Learners are familiar with games resembling drama and they are mainly using their own experience in the activity. The familiarity supports the learner’s confidence - crucial in language learning. Next effect of dramatizing is pleasant atmosphere which presents prompts for children of all levels. Humour, surprise and acting bring a lot of fun to the classroom and

certainly comfort all class. Lastly, positive mood is also achieved by the the absence of threat of a bad result for not being accurate. A child may forget what to say, or tell it in a completely different way or even with the help of gestures. This marks dramatizing as an open-ended exercise carrying the possibility to convey and receive messages on different levels helping weaker learners to keep the pace. The communicative concept of drama opens the door to all children, no matter how “good’ they are. Therefore all these principles are a great asset in mixed ability class helping to even differences in it.

## **4 Methodology of dramatizing activities in EFL classes**

### **4.1 Dramatizing for the first time**

Many teachers are rather skeptical about introducing dramatizing into the classroom regardless of its advantages. Their fear comes from two basic preconceptions. Firstly, as Dougill (1982, p.30) points, they feel uncomfortable teaching a technique they have never experienced and think of some special training as a necessity. Secondly, they feel that they are losing their grip on the class and dramatizing will harm rapport.

Needless to say, part of their objections might be true. Dougill (1987, p.27) indicates ,for instance, that standard ways of conducting a lesson have got obviously better means of keeping a class under control. The teacher is in charge and directs all activities whilst children are not allowed to move and talk unless they are asked. However, children are literally pleased to speak, move, and leave their chairs and that is of course, riskier in terms of discipline than sitting and reading from a textbook. But on the other hand taking little risk with dramatizing could be much more rewarding and enjoyable for both teacher and children.

The other obstacle is teacher's self-confidence in drama. Acting may seem inaccessible to teachers but dramatizing is not a theatre and most of the activities are very natural and simple. Children will probably not enjoy difficult drama experiments and neither will an inexperienced teacher attempt this. "Begin from where you are "suggests Way (1967, p.28). Starting with uncomplicated activities can give teacher plenty of time to acclimatize.

## **4.2 Planning the dramatizing activity**

### **4.2.1 Aims**

Once the teacher overcomes the initial shyness he or she must take several facts into account. Firstly, as Ur (1991, p.9) suggests, “The acting is done for the sake of the language ..., not for exhibition.” Each teacher of English, who plans to enter the area of dramatizing, has to realize that the focal point is fluent and meaningful communication and each component serves this purpose. Knowing this, the teacher has got a good starting point for planning an activity.

Good planning will “...eliminate much of the chaos that ill-defined ideas can produce.”, recommends Dougill (1987, p.28) therefore the teacher has to carefully consider many further factors beside language aims. These include experience of the teacher and children with drama, children’s age (interests, specifics) and level of English, time and resources available, character of a class (Do they like acting?; Do they feel relaxed in my classes?) and finally the space requirements of an activity. Some of the factors which are more specific or important for dramatizing activities are described separately here.

### **4.2.2 Language used in the dramatizing activity**

One of the most important points of planning is judging the language needs for a particular activity. Although non-verbal exercises usually require no language, some of these exercises are intended to be followed by a discussion or by another exercise in which some language is necessary.

The initial part of the activity is its preparation and children must use operational language to agree on roles and plan what they are going to do. It is always practical to give them cues which provide children some guidance. The operational language would be ideally English but in this phase it is not necessarily wrong to allow the pupils to speak in their mother tongue as Holden (1981, p.28) suggests. She also explains that the mother tongue can

save misunderstanding and accelerate the preparation, especially in complicated activities.

The second part is the actual acting and children use target language structures corresponding with the lesson's goals. In both parts the children must be equipped with language tools enabling their communication with others. This means that the teacher has to decide what structures, vocabulary etc. children know and what way he or she could revise and refresh the knowledge. This implies the teacher can not introduce too many language items at once.

#### *4.2.3 Starting gently*

Language is the only part of the activity in which the learner has to act. An actor in the theatre needs to master a whole set of expressions, techniques and theatrical skills to succeed on the stage. Children might think about drama this way as well, but the highest accomplishment for the teacher is when the child does not know he or she is acting at all. After all, acting is not the goal; therefore no special drama training is needed. However, the apparent simplicity does not mean that children can be thrown into deep water of dramatizing immediately. Pupils and their fragile trust have to be treated gently. Starting with simple non-verbal exercises is beneficial for beginners among both learners and teachers.

#### *4.2.4 Atmosphere in the class*

The third of the highlighted planning elements is the least tangible of all. As classes can be different they will have different attitudes toward acting. Class atmosphere can spoil any well meant activity even if everything else works well. Dramatizing is commonly welcomed as a relief from long sitting-days and even children who hold back at the beginning will finally take part. However, as Dougil (1987, p.34) warns, certain classes, typically older children, do not enjoy drama since learners fear ridicule or may feel

intimidated. Defective relationships are the best drama- killers of all and the teacher should reflect on it.

#### *4.2.5 Space requirements*

The final comment on planning says, “Think about the setting.” Dramatizing activities are activities of movement. This requires at least some space in a classroom for letting the activities open. Small and overcrowded classes narrow teacher’s repertoire to a minimum. Traditional seating arrangement is also an obstacle. The ideal opposite is a horseshoe shaped seating recommended by many authors and teachers for its variability. The children use the place in the middle without having to move desks and they can observe each other easily.

### **4.3 Considerations on running a lesson**

#### *4.3.1. The pre-activity stage*

The children are supposed to “warm up” in this part of the lesson. As Dougill (1987, p.9) says, “...one cannot simply start doing drama from scratch.” First of all they need to revise language which will be needed for the dramatizing activity. The teacher is not very limited here therefore he may choose any technique, usually balancing the difficulty of the dramatizing activity. Warm-ups that start the lesson can be used also assist “to foster the climate of trust, awareness and group cohesion...” includes Dougill (Ibid). If the children need to be activated after a calmer activity the teacher may use acting for warm up already. It is particularly useful as training before the more acting-weighted dramatizing exercises. The link between the preliminary exercise and the dramatizing activity is usually provided by the common topic.

#### *4.3.2 The introductory part of the activity*

The opening of dramatizing activity is a crucial part for the whole activity. The teacher has to introduce the activity. This task entails setting the background and defining a task to give pupils a motive to work. The teacher briefly outlines the contours of expected development of the sketch and presents the characters. Then the work has to be organized and groups divided. The children should be supplied by cues, the core scenarios or, preferably, an example of the sketch so they find needed help and stay within the supposed language aim. At last, the children start to practice a sketch and the teacher's role is to monitor the activity or help the children who work in the groups.

#### *4.3.3 The main part of the activity*

The main part of the dramatizing activity is acting. It does usually involve speaking or in some cases induces some language production (speaking, writing) afterwards. The sketch or miming is presented in front of the whole class or in the group so the children get the feedback in form of their peers' and teacher's reaction or comments. At this point, the teacher has to keep in mind that, as Dougill (1987, p.35) observes, drama "...exposes students to comments and criticism that demand a sensitive use of mainly positive and encouraging evaluation." Vágnerová (2000, p.234) further emphasizes, "The evaluation of the teacher and the student's peers has an enormous importance for children." Since the goal of the exercise is fluency, it is highly desirable to correct only when necessary and in a gentle way so the students are not threatened and afraid to speak. The teacher should finish an activity little earlier since, as Duff (1982, p.20) concludes, "Too much time spend on an activity leads to a slackening of pace and a loss of interest." The activity can be finished with an informal review which is suitable for dramatizing more than formal assessment.



#### *4.3.4 After the activity*

The follow up activities are continuing in the topic and ideally complementing the speaking exercise by employing the other skills. Children are given the opportunity to calm down after the dramatizing performance.

## **5 Thesis**

Teaching children means dealing with an almost infinite number of emotions and attitudes. One cannot expect a uniform mass following conductor's commands that is standing in front of twenty-five unique individuals. Each has its own background, interests, talents and motivation. This diversity naturally influences their linguistic performance in the class, thus it is obvious that all classes are groups of pupils with different language abilities. Although fast and talented learners may need extra attention as well it is the other end of the ability scale, weak learners, who give the teacher much head-scratching. The teacher's task is to give all children the same chance to communicate and learn the language. One of the ways to engage all pupils of different learning abilities is using a multitude of dramatizing activities. Based on the theoretical conclusions it can be stated that dramatizing activities have specific features to help weak learners to join the rest of the class and work on the same tasks alongside their classmates in EFL classes as long as the basic methodological principles are followed.

## **6 The teaching project**

### **6.1 Aims of the project**

The practical part of the project is supposed to verify the hypothesis which claims that dramatizing activities have got specific features that help pupils in heterogeneous classes to learn English. To prove this, dramatizing activities were designed and tested at a local elementary school.

### **6.2 Theoretical conclusions**

The theoretical part of the diploma thesis searched elements of dramatizing activities which are supposed to support a weak learner and allow him to participate in the EFL lessons. The research indicated the major assets of dramatizing in the mixed ability class as open-ended character, employment of the body for a meaning enhancement and pleasant atmosphere generated by these activities. The research also defined the major elements of planning and conducting dramatizing activities focused on applying the principles in the mixed ability class.

### **6.3 Research methodology**

The research data were, apart from theory, collected in a teaching practice. The research included planning of six dramatic activities which were used in mixed ability classes. Consequently, the course of each activity was recorded and reflected on. Conclusions were drawn from these critical reflections and following debates learners.

### **6.4 Evaluation of the project**

Evaluation of the project and reflections were based on the comparison of the theoretical hypothesis and outcomes of the activities together with pupils' own opinion on the subject of dramatizing. The observation was aimed at the weaker learners' involvement in the lessons. Two major factors of the lessons

were emphasized: Was the experience enjoyable for the children? Did the children reach the objective of an activity? (Wessels, 1987, p.27)

## **6.5 Discussion on dramatic activities**

One of the factors marking success of an activity was also a main topic in the debate with children. This informal debate should have revealed what way the children see dramatizing activities. Children could have expressed their opinion on several types of activities and basically state whether they find dramatizing easier than other activities. They also discussed what the most appealing feature of dramatizing to them is and whether they feel the acting should be a regular part of their classes. Lastly, the children were asked whether they think that weak learners are able participate in dramatizing activities with the rest of a class.

## **6.6 Activity design**

Activities were chosen with regard to a whole list of factors .Only the primary criteria are mentioned as they carried significantly more importance in the construction of activities. These criteria included the language goal which must have been in concord with the pupils' syllabus. The aim was either derived from the actual need (practice structure, vocabulary or function) or continued within the syllabus. The second criterion, tightly corresponding with the previous one, was the actual language level of the children. The language used in the activities was predominantly based on what children knew and this familiar land was a secure base to explore new language items. Another criterion was both the teacher's and children's experience in dramatizing. As both were limited the selected activities were for the most part out of the easier ones with no difficult acting or directing. Nevertheless; even these simple activities had to cater mixed ability class. This sub-set of criteria included open-ended character of the activity (possibility to react correctly on many levels), a digression from accuracy as well as careful preparation of cues and

scenarios available to help weaker learners. The next criterion was based on providing a creative tension or simply need of communication. This meant setting a meaningful task and constructing information gap that would keep the activity moving and children motivated. Children's motivation was influenced by the overall attitude of class towards the acting as well but it did not influence the choice of activity as much as the choice of a class. There was no point in introducing drama in the classes which resist to this kind of activities. The chosen classes consisted of children of different age and that influenced the type of activity as younger children enjoy simpler and more game-like activities rather than more sophisticated ones of conversational character. Further on, the activity was meant to fit in one regular lesson for the observation and reflection becomes much easier and clearer this way. Last factor, but certainly the most important one, was the presence of the physical action in any form drama allows.

Although secondary factors were taken into account, these were not that important and they did not influence the choice to such degree. They included number of pupils but this turned to be irrelevant later on because the classes were relatively small and suitable for almost any activity. Secondly, the classroom size and seating arrangement had to be taken into account as some activities require more space. Thirdly, the teacher had to consider the 'risk taking level' (Dougill, 1987) since some activities may be likely to cause more of disruption than the others. Therefore the teacher chose and planned the activities so he could keep good control over them.

## **6.7 Teaching conditions**

The project was conducted at the Elementary School in Vratislavice nad Nisou. It is the only elementary school in town but, thanks to its proximity to Liberec, it can be considered a typical suburban school. The school is an

important hub for children from a large area between Jablonec and Liberec and many of them commute to school every day. The elementary school is attended by approximately 600 pupils and it is one of the largest schools in the region.

I became a full-time teacher of English in Vratislavice at the beginning of the previous school year. Thus the children involved in the project were taught by the same person for a longer period of time hence they had a chance to get to know each other very well. A thorough knowledge of the students proved to be a major advantage when choosing appropriate activities, indentifying weak learners and collecting data. Moreover, each of the classes already had experience with dramatizing.

Children at this school start learning English at the age of 9 or 10 (4th grade) and they attend three lessons a week until they reach 9th grade. The English syllabus is based on a communicative approach and follows the national curriculum “Základní škola“.

The lessons were taught in two classrooms; of which one is a specialized English classroom and the other a parent classroom at the primary school. Speaking about dramatizing, it is essential to mention the physical classroom settings. Activities of movement require an additional room to run smoothly. The specialized class offered better conditions since seating was organized in a horse-shoe formation which offered more contact between the students and the teacher as well as enough place to organize dramatizing sessions. The 4.B parent classroom had a traditional seating arrangement, but an extra space in the back of the classroom.

#### 6.7.1 Class profiles

##### *IV.B*

Newcomers to English are nine or ten years old so they can be considered young learners. This brings a lot of specifics into the classroom. First of all, the pupils are over-eager to learn English and their motivation

sometimes exceeds teacher's expectations. The children enjoy short and dynamic activities, and they are especially satisfied when they are allowed to move from their chairs. Next, most of the pupils do not mind taking risks and as long as they feel capable to do the task they try to participate in any activity.

These children are ready to use anything they know to communicate and at the same time they lack any restraints of the older pupils. Sometimes they mix up Czech and English without even noticing it and, frankly, it is not a big issue, both for the teacher and the students. On the other hand, they can not work as independently as the older children. The class is rather a group of separately working individuals than a compact group. The children are likely to communicate more at the teacher–learner level than cooperate with their classmates. They also need a lot of support and reassurance from the teacher. The differences in the actual English language levels and the language learning abilities were not so obvious, yet several children required an extra assistance and encouragement to start working with the others.

## V.B

The fifth grade class has got seventeen children as well. Speaking about English lessons, these children have the same vitality and attitude as the 4<sup>th</sup> graders. However, they begin to become more aware of the learning and its difficulties. The worst marks are regularly touching the bottom of the grading scale which strongly contrasts to the free-of-failure world of the 4<sup>th</sup> class. Despite this fact, the positive atmosphere in the class is almost palpable, which helps to encourage the below average students who can really try hard without being afraid of failure. The overall results of the class are above average with just few weaker learners.

## IX.B

This class has been already doing very well in English last year so there is no surprise that they are the most advanced group of English learners at the school. After the pupils had gone through the sieve of the eight year, in which many of their classmates left the school, the class became very clearly structured. Two genuinely talented (ESL) pupils passed the entrance exams at secondary grammar school. Five other students are going to study at specialized secondary schools. Their results in English are excellent to average. Two pupils are going to attend training institutions and their results are remarkably below average. The worst English learners of these may sometimes struggle to keep the pace with the best ones as the difference gap has opened up too much during the years. One of the pupils is an extreme case of a low-achiever. He has been receiving “fours” in English for two years now. He could not stand the tempo and seems to have stopped trying a long time ago. Nevertheless, he may occasionally try hard when he receives a task at his level. Despite of these differences all of the pupils have developed a certain kind of independence and style of work. They have become really responsible and aware of their goals and also their abilities. These qualities alongside with their generally positive attitude towards English are a great benefit of the English lessons. Moreover, the class is always willing to help the pupils with weaker language abilities and treat them with respect.

## **6.8 Dramatic activities**

### *6.8.1 Activity No.1 – Concert*

*Class:* 5.B

*Number of pupils:* 17

*Age of pupils:* 11

*Time:* 8min



*Aim:* Practice the communicative use of present tense verb forms in affirmative, negative sentences and simple questions. This exercise is focused on speaking skills.

*Objective:* Children will be able to choose an appropriate present simple tense verb form in simple declarative and interrogative sentence, with names or personal pronouns as subjects.

*Academic task:* Pupils will be recognizing mimed instruments and acting out a music gig.

*Context:* Pupils were to finish a unit. This lesson served as a revision and preparation for an upcoming test. Children had learned conjugation of verbs in present tense and are already able to use simple questions. They had come across most of vocabulary used in the lesson earlier. This activity followed an introductory exercise - music band names and music instrument listing.

*Materials:* none

*Thesis focus:* This is an exercise in which an actual acting is silent but accompanied by realistic discussion and mime-guessing.. All three parts incorporate features helping weaker pupils such as open-end character of possible language output, game-like character of the activity or a real need of a discussion result.

*Stages of the activity:*

The teacher divided the children into groups of four or five. Each group sat at one desk. The teacher explained the pupils that each group was going to be one music band and each member of the group had to choose one musical instrument to play.

After the introduction the teacher explained the rules. Everyone had to speak English throughout the whole activity and the teacher appointed a language sheriff to enforce this. The sheriff did not have any specific authority apart from his notebook where he recorded any Czech speaking children. Then the teacher pointed out that some phrases and musical instruments are written on

the board as a help (You play.../No, I play.../he plays.../she doesn't play.../ok/all right/ what do you play? / What does she play? ) and asked what they meant .The last rule was not to tell any other group member what were the instruments that the children chose.

A decision making part took not more than 5 minutes. The pupils discussed what musical instrument would each group member play. After they were finished, the teacher told the class that each group would do a silent gig with their instruments and invited the first band to perform. After about thirty seconds the teacher stopped the band and let the other children ask what instruments they thought the band members were playing. There were sample questions and answers on the board (Do you play drums? Yes. /No.). The band members answered. All bands took their turn. Finally all class gave votes to the most successful music band.

### *Reflection:*

The topic of the lesson was very motivating by itself. The children loved to share their music idols with friends and therefore everyone participated. Therefore it was not too difficult to encourage children to build their own band and choose instruments. Straightforward instructions were easy enough to be understood quickly and most children started a discussion instantly. Although few children hesitated at the very beginning, they eventually joined the discussion. The class was pretty surprised by the presence of a language sheriff; however, the language supervisor was very effective. Whereas he reminded some children to speak English at the beginning, he was almost unneeded in the later part of the discussion. Moreover the sheriff drew attention away from the teacher and he could monitor and help the pupils more

freely. Surprisingly enough, even the bad speakers used solely English and took the rule quite seriously. They either reduced their message to names (“Petr drums, Teresa guitar.”) or gestures (pointing or nodding) or used some phrases from the board. Many children, however, successfully used whole sentences (“No, I don’t play the drums!”). Eventually the groups split their musical instruments and they were ready for the gig. The children pretending to play musical instruments elicited immediate reactions. There was a lot of laugh about and the children started to guess instruments even before the group finished its performance. I had to stop the gig and repeat the rules. The activity went on till two groups finished their turns. Few pupils did not follow an example (“Petr plays the drums” or “Petr, do you play drums?”) and they used just the simplified version again (Petr drums.). There were differences in on-the-stage acting as well but even shy children managed to imitate.

#### *Conclusion:*

The exercise apparently attracted pupils from the very beginning and the reality like character of the discussion got all children involved. The weaker pupils benefited from the possibility of being able to use any means of communication and kept their focused since they were interested in the topic.

The next part, silent acting was not difficult. The class, obviously caught by the atmosphere of the game, reacted spontaneously and promptly. The weaker learners joined freely both in the guessing and acting parts, some of them adventuring into more than one or two word answers, some of them excelling in the gig.

### 6.8.2 Activity No.2 – Mr. Under

*Class:* 5.B

*Number of pupils:* 17

*Age of pupils:* 11

*Aim:* practice describing locations using phrases *there is/there are* and the prepositions of place

*Objective:* Children will be able to describe someone's position in the room

*Academic task:* Children will guess/describe position of their classmates in the room

*Materials:* paper slips with preposition names (Mr. On, Mr. Under)

*Time:* max 5'

*Thesis focus:* This exercise is aimed on direct association of a body action and meaning which may simplify the understanding to anybody. Another helpful feature can be the open-end character of response from the pupils.

*Context:* Children have described positions and learned prepositions in the previous lesson and they are supposed to know related vocabulary. They did not describe a room though. This activity followed a textbook picture description and a listening exercise. Both focused on the similar aim and topic. The activity was meant to recapitulate the lesson in an amusing way leaving the textbook aside.

#### *Stages:*

The teacher announced the game and chose one child to come in front of the class and introduced him/her as Mr. /Mrs. On. The teacher let the child climb on the desk and asked where the child was repeating his/her name. This was also written on the board (Where is he? What is his name? He is on the desk. His name is Mr. On). The teacher asked several children the same question and they answered following the example.

Then the teacher chose other four pupils and gave them prepared slips with the names on (In., On, Under, Next to, Between.). They were prompted to take position which would reveal their names. Children were asked to start guessing who is who. They were supposed to follow an example (He is on the.... His name is Mr. On). Once the first group was uncovered another quartet took their place. This was repeated until three groups exchanged their place.

The final part of the exercise was a whole class revision of the meaning of each preposition with the teacher. The teacher used a pen and asked about the current position of it.

#### *Conclusion:*

Although the activity was not too difficult, it was designed as a revision at last, it did not seem to amuse children so much and some of them struggled to understand the concept of the guessing game. At the very beginning children seemed to be distracted for some reason. This might have been an early time of the day or the initial test that children took; nevertheless, it took several attempts to get them focused. Then the first few children who were called up to guess names appeared confused or unsure. One of them did not identify any prepositions at all. The teacher had to ask again and point at the board to give the children option for answer. However, the children learned very quickly with a little help and gradually joined the guessing. Some children tried to use prepared phrases, the others tried to shout the prepositions only and the teacher had to ask additional questions. Weaker learners were naturally using the simpler version and joined the class later. The performers in front of the board were chosen randomly and although some were shy everyone was doing well. The activity had features of a total physical response exercise in which the children in front of the class physically showed what the meaning of each preposition was. So far, this activity proved that every pupil could express the meaning by acting. The message is clear as long as the children understand the principle of the game. However, when the children did not follow the

introductory part, they could not react properly and did not join the guessing until they were prompted or until they learned answers from classmates. Despite of this fact, the pupils fully used the option of variable answer (guess) once they were sure with a preposition.

### *6.8.3 Activity No. 3 – Phone call*

*Class:* 4.b

*Age of pupils:* 9-10

*Number of pupils:* 17

*Aim:* Exercise phone call and practice numbers. Main skill practiced is speaking

*Objective:* Children will know new phrases used in a telephone conversation and numbers 0-10

*Academic Task:* Children call their friend to arrange a meeting at the café

*Time:* 10'

*Materials:* mobile phones, textbook (optional)

*Context:* Children know numbers 0-10 from the previous lesson. This activity follows a telephone number dictation and a listening exercise in which the children listen to a very similar telephone conversation they need to act out later on.

*Thesis focus:* As children focus on passing the message rather than accuracy they should be more likely to speak freely. The fun-element of the activity is another strong feature supposed to draw children in.

#### *Stages of the activity:*

Children were working in pairs. The teacher explained the task- to call up a friend and to plan a meeting with him or her at a café. The teacher wrote a skeleton script of the conversation on the board with names used in the

textbook. Then he chose one pair of pupils and used their names instead of original ones on the board. This pair had to read the script aloud, each pupil his or her lines.

Then the children started to work on their own conversation. They had five minutes to prepare a similar phone call adding their names or phone numbers. The teacher pointed out that they could choose a name for the café they meet at as well.

After five minutes the teacher stopped the work and selected one child. The teacher was on one side of the imaginary line calling the child. As they finished two pairs had to perform their own calls. They could use the board for help. The next task was to rework the conversation. One had to call a friend again but his or her mum picks up the phone and the child had to ask whether the friend is at home. Therefore the teacher introduced new phrases and rearranged the children into groups of three. The script of this conversation was written on the board and the teacher selected two children to act as a mother and a child. All three read a telephone call with real names and numbers. Then the children practiced the same conversation themselves. When finished, the children acted out their phone call with real mobile phones and a ring tone to start a call. Three groups took their turn.

### *Reflection:*

The learners really enjoyed the telephone calls and they prepare and acted them out very well. In the first part of this exercise children groped little bit so the teacher used some Czech to remind them that they have to plan meeting with a friend. On the phone they spoke English only but they used Czech to organise their calls. One part of the class strictly followed the script, the other part was able to improvise – add occasional “How are you” or left out words they forgot. The conversations led always to an agreement no matter what means were used. The following part amused everybody. The ring tone was a

good starter of the call and once its sound launched the conversation children seriously tried hard to arrange the meeting in English as if they really called. The listeners followed the dialogue very attentively and few times stepped in with an attempt to correct their classmates. The funniest moment was when a child introduced himself as Mrs.Kašíčková or Mrs. Pražáková (mums). The idea of being a classmate's mum made children pretend voice. Lastly, it was very surprising that children spoke so well since they have just started to learn English and most of the phrases were new to them.

*Telephone call record:*

A Hello? This is 777 766 710.

B Hello. This ...Mrs. Mihalyová?

A Yes.

B Is Lucka .....Is Lucka there?

A Yes. (calling Lucka )

B Listen, meet me at the Café O.K.?

C O.K.

B Good Bye

C Good Bye.

*Conclusion:*

This activity brought a lot of emotions into the class. Fun together along with the pretending-game principle, so familiar and exciting to the ten years old children, appeared to be the strongest features encouraging weaker learners. They weren't under such pressure as the accuracy was not stressed that much, therefore they spoke "on the phone" surprisingly well.



#### 6.8.4 Activity No. 4 — *I'm big*

(Adapted from Sarah Phillips, 2001)

*Class:* 4.b

*Age of pupils:* 9-10

*Number of pupils:* 16

*Aim:* Learn and practice new vocabulary (set of adjectives), focused on speaking skills (pronunciation and rhythm)

*Objective:* Children will be able to associate the adjectives (both spoken and written form) with the actual meaning

*Academic task:* Children repeat and act out a simple rhythmic chant.

*Time:* 15'

*Materials:* none

*Context:* Children use the adjective-noun connection for the first time .The adjectives are introduced in the initial part of the lesson and practiced with a textbook later.

*Thesis focus:* The activity effectively connects body movement with rhythmic chanting. The body represents the meaning of an adjective thus helping everybody to learn the new vocabulary. The easy pattern of the exercise may give weaker learners a chance to work with the rest of the class. Young children are likely to be motivated by a choral chanting which they enjoy at this age.

*Stages of the activity:*

The teacher drew characters representing all adjectives on the board (*big, small, short, and tall, happy, good, and bad*) and wrote the chant below them. He told children to copy the chant and pictures into their exercise books. When the children were finished the teacher let the pupils repeat chunks of the chant

after him, focusing on rhythm and pronunciation. In the second and the third turn miming was added. All children mimed and chanted together at one time. Next the teacher assigned the roles, e.g. groups or just pairs were given one adjective(role) to act out with the matching part of the chant. The groups had to say their lines one by one in the proper order as teacher pointed at them. Then the teacher asked the children to act alongside the chant. Finally they performed the complete chant with the teacher as a conductor.

*I'm big. I'm small. I'm short. I'm tall. I'm happy. I'm sad. I'm good. I'm bad*

#### *Reflection:*

This was a very complex activity which incorporated writing, drawing, chanting and acting as well. The variety of activities was certainly one of the major factors which kept children's attention from the very beginning till the last moment. The pupils liked the funny pictures and enjoyed the initial drawing. Once they were ready the children started to practice the chant. Few of them did not chant at first but joined the class eventually. The pupils picked up the rhythm and pronunciation very easily and seemed to be amused by chanting. They wanted to repeat the chant over and over. Then, as the acting part was added, the children got quite disturbed and started to make more mistakes. They were obviously focused on their body more than on the language as such. However, the pupils improved very quickly and enjoyed themselves very much. They took the acting very seriously and the characters were sketched in an excellent way. The only drawback of the activity was the lack of space in the classroom and children had to find some space all about the tight room.

#### *Conclusion:*

This dramatic activity contained some very evident features that are helping the weaker learners to work with the class. The expediency of the activity for weak learners was apparent in several points. First they were able to get ready for

chanting and acting through the introductory part, drawing and writing. Then, the activity offered enough time to practice the chant and that helped the pupils gain the confidence for work within the group. But probably the most interesting part for the whole group was the performance by itself which the children genuinely enjoyed.

#### *6.8.5 Activity No. 5 — At the garage*

*Class:* 9.B

*Age of pupils:* 14

*Number of pupils:* 9

*Aim:* practice describing damage (passive voice} and suggestions (need +gerund}, the main skill practiced is speaking.

*Objective:* Pupils should be able to describe damage on a car and suggest necessary repairs.

*Academic task:* Children negotiate the price of repair at the garage.

*Time:* 25

*Materials:* carton box, carton sheets, a textbook, blue-tack, scissors, felt pens, hand-outs (see supplements}

*Context:* The learners talked about car accidents last lesson. They were practicing giving advice and passive voice before. The lesson starts with vocabulary revision by picture description (car parts) and continues with a short chat refreshing the story of a car accident that the children read last week. Then they created lists of all possible damage and suggested repairs for a crashed car. This was a start point for an upcoming activity in which the children act out a short after-accident sketch at a garage.

*Thesis focus:* The role-play offers children the actual opportunity to act out their character therefore they can communicate by all possible means - speech, body and props. This should help especially weaker learners in getting the message across

*Stages of the activity:*

The teacher divided the class into two parts. He told the pupils that each group is a member of the staff of one garage or repair shop. They had to design a shop sign (carton paper sheet) and choose a name of the business. The children had to cut out different car parts of their choice of carton as well. They could have chosen any car part which was in their textbooks. The teacher stopped the activity after approximately ten minutes when almost everyone was finished. The children received hand-outs (appendix) in which they found a guideline for the sketch. The teacher translated the more difficult of the phrases in the guide and explained the pupils that their task would be to negotiate a price of a work on a damaged car. The children started to practice in pairs of which one was always a mechanic and the other one a customer. This part ended in eight minutes and the teacher asked the children to stick their carton car parts on prepared carton boxes representing cars, to hang up the shop signs and to clear the middle part of the classroom. Once the stage was ready one of the pairs was to act out the sketch. They were supposed to use the carton car as a prop. The teacher commented on this conversation and chose randomly two children who were not in the same pair to start the sketch again. Two more pairs took their turn and the best performance was judged by the children themselves at the very end.

### *Reflection:*

The atmosphere in the class was relaxed and children surely appreciated distraction in the 5th lesson of the day. A lead-in part went very quickly. Children liked the idea of a carton box car and everyone was engaged in the preparation. The first part of the activity did not need discussion between the group members but children chatted freely about their creations (in Czech of course). At the beginning of the second phase the hand-outs were distributed and children started to practice their sketches. They did not need too much managing and I reminded them to speak in English. However, they tried to make sketches funny so they started to plan thus speak in Czech and they began to write their lines down quite spontaneously. I suppose they were really looking forward to the actual performing in front of their classmates. Some learners were just sitting and writing. Conversations or better said reading of a script were rather stiff at this point. Presentations were different from preparation since children started to move and reading became too hard then. They accidentally left their scenarios on occasions but the role-play wasn't too persuasive. The following part was much more about real acting. Children did not know who they were going to talk to, what was damaged etc. The weaker students had problems to react and they immediately simplified their vocabulary to enumerating just the car parts which were to be repaired or just pointed at them. They expressed the disagreement with a high price (low price) by gestures. They also looked for short cuts and had a tendency not to discuss a price for too long. On the contrary, the best students communicated quite freely and came to an agreement with ease.

### *Conclusion:*

This activity showed some of the more advanced dramatizing and it also put some of the dramatizing qualities mentioned above into a spotlight. Firstly, the children were set into a situation in which they needed to communicate. That was neither embarrassing nor too difficult since they did prepare for the sketch

thoroughly. The sketch was not aimed at an accurate reproduction of prepared lines and gave everybody chance to improvise and use easier ways to come to an agreement. The carton cars proved a vital aid when it came to a car damage description and one's expressions of disapproval helped where the price was too high.

### *6.8.6 Activity No. 6 — Job Centre*

*Class:* 9.B

*Age of pupils:* 14

*Number of pupils:* 9

*Context:* The activity was preceded by a discussion on the British school system and a textbook exercise concerning job advertisements and a Job Centre topic. The children basically followed a pattern of the advertisements they saw in the textbook in this activity.

*Activity:*

*Aim:* Practice phrases and vocabulary related to jobs and asking for a job. The activity is focused on speaking skills.

*Objective:* Learners will be able to write down a simplified job advertisement and ask for the job at the Job Centre.

*Thesis focus:* Children's spoken discourse may vary largely depending on the language level of a particular speaker; however, the difference should not harm the objective of the conversation. Taking roles should be also enjoyable, which makes it a great motivating factor for the activity for many pupils.

*Time:* 15'

*Materials:* small sheets of paper

*Context:* The activity was preceded by a discussion on the British school system and a textbook exercise concerning job advertisements and a Job Centre

topic. The children basically followed a pattern of the advertisements they saw in the textbook in this activity.

*Thesis focus:* Children's spoken discourse may largely vary depending on the language level of a particular speaker; however, the difference should not harm the objective of a conversation. Also, taking roles is quite enjoyable and it helps the students to lose restraints. These are important prerequisites for an activity that aims to be motivating for many pupils.

*Stages of the activity:*

The teacher told children to write down a list of data entries for a job advertisement on the board. This included a job title, pay, qualification and experience. The pupils got ideas from the previous exercise in the textbook. Then the teacher discussed with the children what information does each entry include. Each pupil was supposed to create two advertisements and write them down on two separate sheets of paper. The advertisements were meant to be kept real concerning the salary and qualification. After the pupils were finished, half of the advertisements was given to a designated Job Centre clerk who may offer these jobs to unemployed applicants. The children kept the other half of the advertisements so they could proof their own job preference, pay demands and qualifications. This was not said at the beginning therefore the children were left with a completely random selection of jobs and qualification. Subsequently, the children were prompted to think of possible questions which would be asked by a clerk. Four questions asking about the four entries were written on the board and the children started to practice a conversation in pairs. Meanwhile the teacher wrote down few phrases which may have been needed for the final conversation piece. Then he chose a clerk and an unemployed person to start a conversation. After gathering all information (asking the prepared questions) the clerk may have offered a job to the visitor and the visitor could either agree or dismiss. The only firmer rule of

the conversation was the need of asking at least three questions. The teacher let the activity running for the next three turns and in each of those both the clerk and the visitor swapped.

### *Reflection:*

The activity took longer than the teacher expected. The learners made their advertisements very thoroughly but they, in four or five cases, did not follow the rules and made up fantasy jobs, pays and qualifications. This fact slightly complicated further stages. The question/answer drill in pairs did really pay off since many children were mostly unable to create questions and answer them from scratch. The Job Centre sessions went two ways. Some children, usually those who did not speak well, chose quickly the first job that was proposed to them even when it did not match their qualification. They were simply not interested in further conversation. Two boys had different advertisements than expected and they could not match them with the Job Centre offer. But this fact was not necessarily bad. As children found the made up degrees and pay claims funny and everyone somehow enjoyed the activity more. The language being used varied from only fragments of questions ("How much pay? Money?") to almost fluent discourse; however, every one was able to understand since students knew what answer or question to expect.

### *Conclusion:*

This dramatic activity did not have boundaries set so firmly and although it offered good opportunities to speak it lost some of its point due to the loose rules and a blurry finish. In general, children have enjoyed the advertisement preparation but not everyone was interested in the following conversation. The weaker learners were staggering a lot and just wanted to finish the dialogue as



quickly as possible. Nevertheless, these learners could use the language they knew and basically fulfilled the task correctly, although lacking the enthusiasm. The most projected feature supporting weaker learners was the open ended character of the conversation and not the supposedly “funny” character of role-play.

## **6.9 Results of the debate**

The debates were based on what the children experienced in English classes. They did agree that some kinds of dramatizing, miming for instance, are a regular part of English lessons. On contrary, they do not do a not-memorizing-role-play very often. Opposite the observation in the activities, the children find the role-plays difficult compared to other regular techniques in the classroom. The pupils favour easier exercises as miming. Everyone agreed that acting is enjoyable but some children prefer just to watch the other like to perform as well. The children also agreed they may be less nervous acting in front of a group than in front of the whole class. One child literally said he hates the acting in front of a class. Finally, most of the children said that even weak learners can take part in dramatizing activities and work together with other children.

## **7 Conclusions**

### **7.1 Situation**

The dramatizing activities used in English lessons at the Vratislavice Elementary School were intended to prove their ability to become an important unifying element of the heterogeneous classes. According to this presumption, dramatizing has got valuable features helping to engage all children in the learning process, especially pupils with low language abilities.

The course of the activities was noted down after each lesson and served with the separate debate with weak learners as data for an overall reflection. The activities were conducted in the 4th, 5th and 9th grade classes (children between the age of 9 and 15) within the regular syllabus. This selection covered both true beginners and children who are ready to step in pre-intermediate waters. All the classes showed signs of problems arising from their heterogeneity.

### **7.2 The effects of dramatizing activities**

#### *7.2.1 The source of motivating atmosphere*

Children who do have problems maintaining the pace with the rest of the class are often difficult to motivate. One of the presumptions stated in the theoretical part is that drama brings humour and pleasant atmosphere which guarantees greatly motivated learners of all language levels. Very noticeable result of this research was that the dramatizing was indeed a wonderful source of motivating atmosphere. Children in the 4th grade were excited when they could pretend and act in both of the activities used in their class. The language that they used was suddenly only a part of the game. The first activity's appeal was strengthened by rhythmic chanting and even shy students did join in after a while. The second activity gained alluring authenticity by using real telephones. It was a pleasure to see children so excited while making a phone call. The 5th graders' activities were based on miming and even if some

children partly held back they took part in the activity with smile on their faces. The surprising gig at the end of the first activity and unexpected improvisations in the second made everybody laugh. The pupils in the 9th grade enjoyed the possibility of creating their own characters and funny situations. Children agreed that the most appealing feature of dramatizing is fun. Basically all children seemed to be comfortable and relaxed in a class where there is so much excitement with no pressure upon them.

### *7.2.2 Meaningfulness of an activity*

Although very important, the positive atmosphere alone does not make the pupil talk instantly. The activity must imply a task that the child wants to accomplish. The recognition of Mr. Under or agreeing on reasonable price for a car repair should be the much desired momentum of this type of activities. Yet, this might be spoiled when the pupil knows in advance how much he or she will pay for the mending of a bumper. The teacher tried to keep this on mind while planning these activities and so he wanted to employ the tension of not knowing in to them. This way curiosity should be raised and urgency to talk provided. Despite of this fact some conversations in the ninth grade resulted in rather mechanical than curious dialogues. The imaginary and probably too virtual task was maybe not so fascinating and appealing for some teenagers. However, the real need to talk in the given situations forced even these learners to communicate. On the other hand, young pupils were impatient to be the first to guess the meaning. The information gap made most of the learners talk and raised interest in them.

### *7.2.3 The range of language production*

The project also clarified an open-ended character of dramatizing and its value for mixed ability classes. The “I’m big” activity does not show any differences between language outputs since everybody does the same. It is the acting which entirely bears the creativity and spontaneity. On the contrary, the

rest of the activities displayed a broad range of different language responses, that were sometimes original, funny and enthusiastic and at other times less exciting and with a clear intention to get the message across using the minimum of language.

Small learners made a telephone call but some of them lost their vocabulary beforehand. As expected it did not really matter that much, they all made their call and they experienced thrilling moments when they leaned on the foreign language. The imaginary impossibility to speak Czech seems to be very beneficial when everybody takes it seriously. Young learners probably did not find it inconvenient and weak students (5th grade) simply used one word utterances in the initial phase of the activity (you guitar / guitar). No one told them to do so, they acted intuitively. This became the breaking point for me. Such well planned activity, producing an almost real discourse on many levels, signalizes that dramatizing can really work, at least with young learners, even when they are not accustomed to it.

On the contrary, the fifteen year old students did not speak with such ease and the preparatory parts went on in Czech. That is most probably connected with much stronger self-awareness of the older students who unlike the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders do not approach the tasks leaving their own personality out of the classroom. They are afraid that by being active and by responding to questions they may embarrass themselves in front of the whole class. Yet, I think that if these activities were used on a daily basis and were supported by meticulous and thorough preparation, it would result in incomparably more relaxed atmosphere even in such classes.

The product varied from fluent sentences to murmuring and nodding, but in few cases the students focused greatly on accuracy, which prevented them from freely expressing themselves. The unblocking effect of drama, which helps to divert the attention from the language accuracy, is certainly more visible in

lower grade classes. Nevertheless, the multiple outcomes of drama activities is indisputably suitable for mixed ability classes.

#### *7.2.4 Contextualized meaning*

The next aspect of dramatizing that helped children to communicate with less polished language was the acting itself. The ring tone in the “phone call” activity clearly marks a start of an activity and the child picks it up – what can be more natural than a movement that they do at least dozen times a day? The context of that activity was lucid for everybody. In other activities children began to engage their body to induce peer reaction (concert), demonstrate the meaning (I’m big) or let the others know what is my opinion (job centre). In all cases pupils were trying to pass the message on. Young children let their imagination work freely and probably did what they would normally do outside the classroom. The 9<sup>th</sup> graders may have shown less action but their acting was more sophisticated. They were able to express disagreement, hesitation or satisfaction when discussing with the job centre clerk. None of those functions needed any language; the means for communication were pointing, nodding, gestures or miming. These ways of communication belong to our every day non-verbal alphabet and the weak learners may securely rely on them. All they need is some reassurance that this is also a possible way how to communicate in a foreign language. That does not mean that the teacher should cease trying to prompt their progress to higher levels of language acquisition.

#### *7.2.5 The security of known*

The learners’ security and confidence comes from the things they already know. But what exactly is so familiar on drama? The answer is encompassed in the previous paragraphs. Improvisation, body language, pretending to be someone else, playing games, making people laugh, are not artificial activities. They are available to the best learner as well as to the one who barely produces

a word in English. Whereas the first child exercises his or her fluency the latter pupil gets his encouraging opportunity to complete the equal task.

### **7.3 Summary of conclusions**

Acting, the cornerstone of dramatizing activities, bestows the body and the feelings to the learning process. Both proved themselves to be useful tools for enhancing the meaning thus widening a range of communicative levels. This aids all kinds of learners in the heterogeneous class to take part in communicative activities. Moreover, the space of multi-level communication lets each learner experience his personal achievement. However, the primary stimulus for learners should not ideally be the language but the successful accomplishment of a task, defined by an activity. Giving students an attractive task seems to be more difficult with teenagers who do not possess the gift to put themselves into a game or role play with such an ease as the young learners. This caused that some 9<sup>th</sup> graders lose their focus and vitality and the outcome of a given activity basically faded. Nevertheless, dramatizing activities taught at the elementary school have confirmed to carry further characteristics which make learners in heterogeneous classes get involved. One of these facets is based on the idea that the goal has to bear an element of the unknown in order to make sense and urge children to speak. The information-gap effect was often a leitmotif of communication in the classroom and the appropriate application of the effect has appeared to be essential initiating and finishing the activities. Lastly, dramatizing activities seemed to be a joy for any class. The focus on a “harmless” activity in which children can’t fail had a very positive impact on the way in which the students grasped the various activities. Watching and experiencing joyful and entertaining performances and reminding the students the well-known atmosphere of child’s play motivated equally all classes. The fact that dramatizing activities contain important features valuable for mixed ability classes is evident. The project also shows that when incorporating dramatizing into EFL classes and EFL mixed ability

classes it is crucial to realize that the activities are very planning-sensitive and the teacher has to primarily consider their meaningfulness, the language needs and the age of learners. As all the more or less important factors mentioned in this project show, incorporating dramatizing may be a very difficult nut to crack for various reasons, ranging from the incompactness of the classes in terms of language abilities to very time consuming and imagination demanding planning of the concrete activities. Nevertheless, it absolutely pays off because there are no better activities I can think of that would be so rewarding both for the learners as for the teachers.

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## **List of appendices**

- I. Activity No.2 : Textbook copy
- II. Activity No.3 : Textbook copy
- III. Activity No.4 : Picture on the blackboard
- IV. Activity No.5: Handout
- V. Activity No.5: Textbook copy
- VI. Activity No.6 : Textbook copy

## 2 Answer the questions.

- 1 What number is Rebecca's house?
- 2 Where do Rebecca and her family have dinner?
- 3 Where do they watch TV?
- 4 Where does Walter sleep?
- 5 How many chairs are there in the dining room?
- 6 Is there a table in the kitchen?
- 7 Does Rebecca listen to the radio in her room?
- 8 Are the CDs in the wardrobe?

## Grammar

### 3 a Complete the table.

We use **there is** and **there are** to describe places.

#### There is / are

There ..... a bathroom upstairs.  
There ..... three rooms downstairs.



### b Translate the sentences into your own language.

## 4 Write **There is** or **There are**.

- 1 ..... four people in Rebecca's house.
- 2 ..... a television in the living room.
- 3 ..... four chairs in the dining room.
- 4 ..... a desk in Rebecca's room.
- 5 ..... four beds in Rebecca's house.
- 6 ..... a telephone in the hall.

## 5 How many of these things are there in the picture in Rebecca's house?

### Example

*There are two children in the picture.*

children	desks	showers
posters	pictures	tables
magazines	animals	lamps
chairs	bags	books

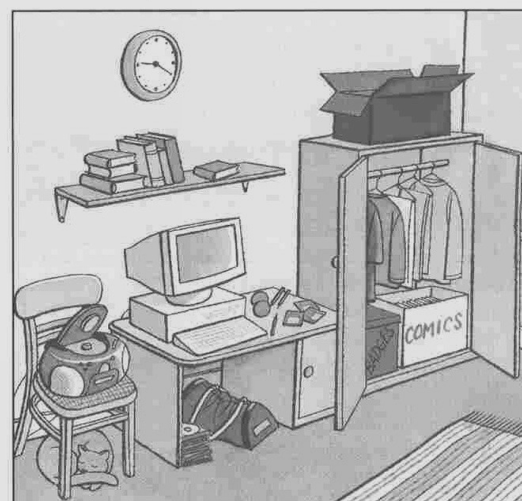
## Listening

### 6 67 Look at the picture of Rebecca's house. Listen. Say where Rebecca is.

*Example She's in the bedroom.*

## Speaking and listening

### 7 Look at the picture.



### a Ask and answer with a partner.

#### Example

- What's this?
- It's a bag.
- What are these?
- They're disks.
- Where is the computer?
- It's on the desk.

on  
in  
under

Use these prepositions.



### b 68 Close your book. Listen and answer the questions.

### c Open your book. Listen again and check your answers.

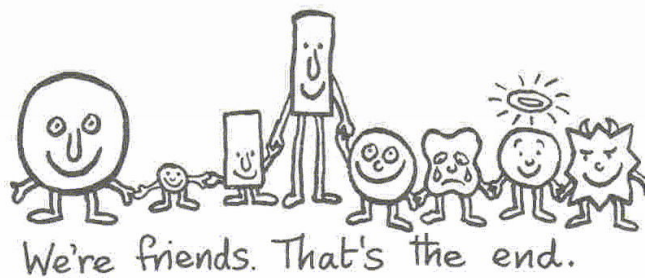
69

## Pronunciation corner

### 8 Listen and repeat.

/d/	/ɔ:/
dog	draw
watch	four
what	wardrobe
comic	hall
clock	quarter





## Exercises

1 Bruce is writing a letter to a friend in Australia. Complete what he says.

Dear Ken,  
We're in \_\_\_\_\_ now. We had an \_\_\_\_\_ today. Before we started, I \_\_\_\_\_ the brakes. The \_\_\_\_\_ shoes needed \_\_\_\_\_, but I couldn't do \_\_\_\_\_ about it then. Later we \_\_\_\_\_ driving along a \_\_\_\_\_ road. Matt was \_\_\_\_\_ The road had a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ and there was a steep \_\_\_\_\_ on one side. Suddenly, as we were going \_\_\_\_\_ a bend, we heard a loud \_\_\_\_\_. We had a \_\_\_\_\_. The brakes wouldn't \_\_\_\_\_ and the van went \_\_\_\_\_. We \_\_\_\_\_ right on the \_\_\_\_\_ of the cliff. Everyone was \_\_\_\_\_. Sue opened the \_\_\_\_\_ and she almost fell out. The van was \_\_\_\_\_ the edge of \_\_\_\_\_ cliff. We didn't \_\_\_\_\_ what to do.

2 What should they do? What do you think? Use this table to give advice.

Sue		move to the back of the van.
Everybody		wait for help.
One of them	should	go for help.
They	shouldn't	move to the front of the van.
		sound the horn.
		shout for help.
		jump out.
		drive the van down the cliff.
		try to reverse the van.
		climb on to the roof of the van.
		pray.
		stay still.

3

### Language spot 1

#### warnings with conditions

If they **move**, the van **might/could** fall.

If they **stay** still, another car **might/could** hit them.

Use the choices in Exercise 2. Say what **might/could** happen, **if** . . .

Here are some ideas to help you:

The van might fall. Sue might fall out.  
Another car might hit them. The van might catch fire.  
They might be killed.

4 Listen. You will hear what happened.

a Note down: Who? What did he/she do?

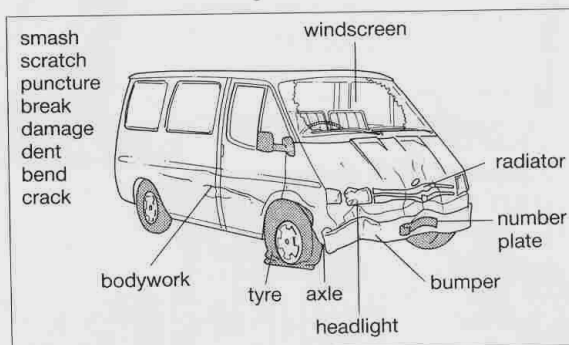
b Complete Bruce's letter.

New words: axle, rope, tie

5 What happened to the van?

Say what happened to the van.

Example *The headlights were broken.*



6

### Language spot 2

#### need + gerund

Can you replace the brake shoes, please?  
The brake shoes **need replacing**.

Can you check the brakes, please?  
The brakes **need checking**.

After the accident Bruce took the van to a garage.  
What did he say?

Use: replace, repaint, repair, straighten

Example

*The headlights need . . .*

### Your life ↓

Write a short play about an accident.

## At the garage

Customer:

Hello.

How are you?

We had a terrible accident.

Can you please check my car?

And look at this!

How much will it cost?

Oh no!!!

It's so expensive.

And how long will it take?

Thanks.

Good bye.



Mechanic:

Hello/good morning/nice to see you again!

Oh! /Wow! /Not bad! /What did you do with your car?

I see, I see.

What a pity.

Your axle was damaged.....

The axle needs.....

It might be around 500 £.


No, it's quite cheap

About 10 days.

You are welcome.

Bye

In the test John had had had and Jane had had had had. Had had had been right.

**4a**  **2** Cleo is at the job centre. Copy the table. Then listen and complete it.

Name:	.....
Address:	.....
Pay:	.....
Last job:	pop singer
Reason for leaving:	.....
Qualifications:	.....
Previous experience:	.....

**b** Now say what we know about Cleo.

**Example**

Before she met Nina, Cleo had been a pop singer.  
She had worked...

**c** Use your chart to reconstruct the dialogue at the job centre.

Note: £10 p.a. = £10 per annum  
or  
£10 a year  
min. = minimum

**5** Here are some of the jobs advertised at the job centre:

 **3**

## JOB CENTRE

**Waiter/waitress**

Pay: £50 p.w. plus tips  
Qualifications required:  
O-level Maths preferred,  
training given

## JOB CENTRE

**Clerk/typist**

Salary: £4000 p.a.  
Qualifications required:  
5 O-levels, including  
Maths and English.  
One year's experience  
preferred

## JOB CENTRE

**Secretary**

Salary: £5500 p.a.  
Qualifications required:  
1 A-level preferred;  
minimum 5 O-levels, inc.  
Maths, English and  
French.  
Min. two years' experience

## JOB CENTRE

**Carpenter's assistant**

Pay: £45 p.w.  
Qualifications required:  
none: training given; must  
be good with hands

## JOB CENTRE

**Petrol pump attendant**  
(part-time)

Pay: £50 p.w.  
Qualifications required:  
O-level Maths preferred

## JOB CENTRE

**Receptionist**

Pay: £70 p.w.  
Qualifications required:  
min. 4 O-levels; pleasant  
manner

## JOB CENTRE

**Hairdresser's assistant**  
(full-time)

Pay: £50 p.w.  
Qualifications required:  
O-level Maths and English  
preferred, training given

**a** Use the information about Cleo to choose a job for her. Explain your choice.

**b** The clerk at the job centre is explaining the jobs to Cleo. Look at the conversation below. Now make a conversation between Cleo and the clerk for one of the other jobs.

**Man** Here's a job as a hairdresser's assistant.

**Cleo** How much is the pay?

**Man** £50 a week.

**Cleo** Hmm, that's not much. Do you need any qualifications?

**Man** They would prefer someone with O-level Maths and English.

**Cleo** Is any experience required?

**Man** No. Training will be given.

**Cleo** Well, I'll think about that one. Have you got any more jobs?